

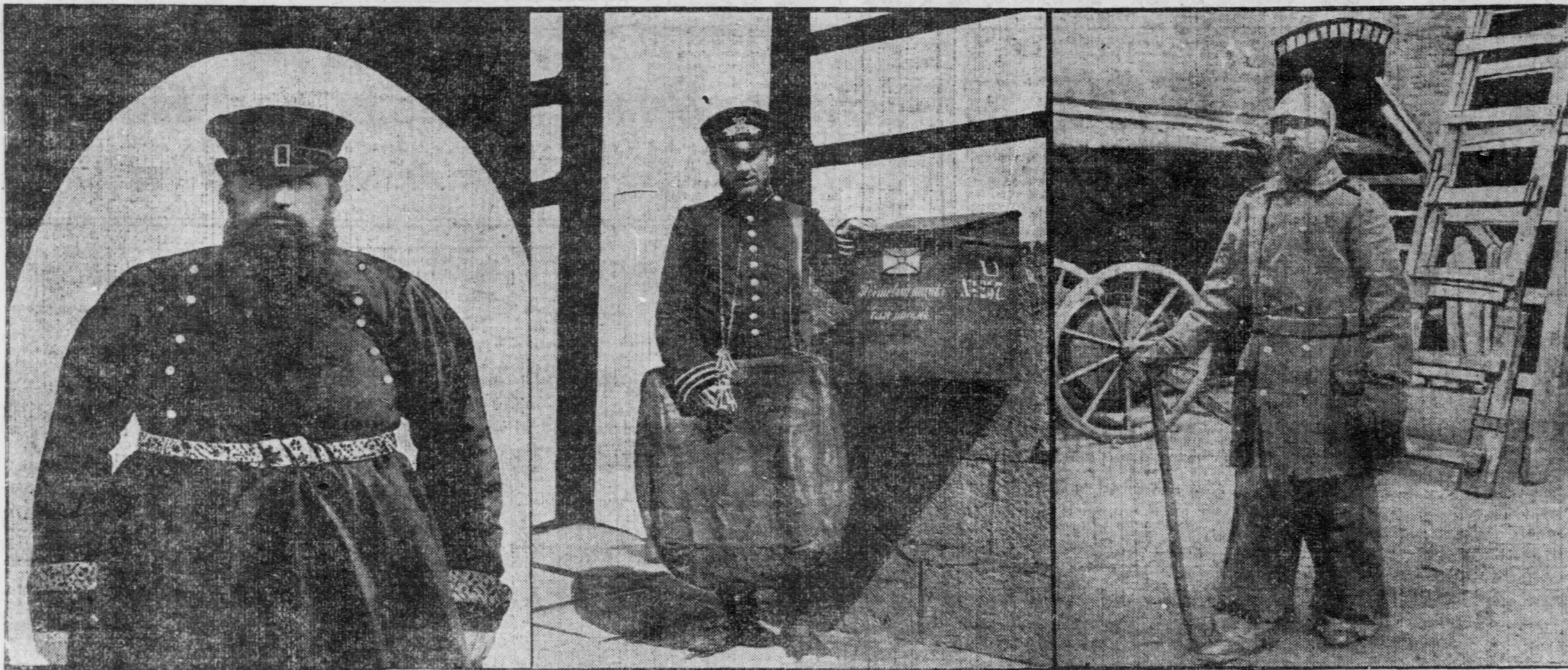
# LABOR CONDITIONS IN RUSSIA.

BY FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

St. Petersburg Has Twenty Thousand Hackmen.

A Postman in St. Petersburg.

A Russian Foreman.



St. Petersburg.—There could be no better way of making the American laboring man appreciate the fortunate conditions that surround him, than to bring to his notice the cheerless state of the bread-winner in Russia. It requires only the comparison of the hampered and famished life of the one, with the privileged and prosperous existence of the other, to show that the Yankee toiler is extremely favored. A gentleman living in Moscow told me about having a dress suit made in that place. He gave the order to a tailoring firm, who furnished the material and sent it out to be made in a Jewish family. Afterward the tailor who made the suit told the owner that all he got for the work was 75 cents. He said further that by utilizing the whole time of his entire family he could earn only two or three dollars a week.

shop, because he cannot afford to pay rent. The people think so little of having their footwear repaired that the artisan must get out where people can see him or he will attract no customers. So he wanders about the streets, carrying his tools with him. The photographer has no difficulty in getting a snapshot of a wayfarer sitting barefooted on the sidewalk, with a cobbler near by in the act of making necessary repairs. A few cents a day is the best return the itinerant may expect for his exposure in tramping endlessly through the dismal streets in all kinds of weather.

## Clever With the Ax.

The Russian carpenter is a peculiar genius whose principal tool is the ax. Although his skill is confined mostly to this one implement, he is famous for his skill with it. As far back as the Philadelphia exposition the carpenters from the land of the czar created a sensation among other craftsmen, when they reported at the site where the Russian building was to be constructed, with no tools other than axes. To the surprise of the onlookers they not only constructed the house in first-class style, but made beautiful decorations which were almost lacelike in their fineness. Yet skilled carpenters in Russia earn only 75 cents a day.

Electrical workers are not very expert because their industry was slow in getting a start in the country. When it was proposed to light the streets of the various cities in Russia, the officials objected to the innovation. The mayor of Moscow opposed it by saying that those who wished to go about at night should carry lanterns. It is only recently that lights were placed in the great St. Isaac's cathedral at St. Petersburg. Formerly each worshiper was supposed to bring his own candle to light him in and out of the holy edifice.

## Boilermakers Unreliable.

It is commonly remarked that the employer of boiler makers who would make any headway with his contracts must have two sets of workmen, one to be on duty while the other gets drunk. The fact that the Russians are so frequently incapacitated by drink is not so much due to heavy consumption, as to his inability to stand even moderate indulgence. The common drink is vodka, a white liquor much weaker than whiskey. Though the average American could drink ten or twelve glasses of it, the Russian is so poorly fed that even a little of it makes him drunk.

The manner in which the Russian firemen conduct themselves when there is a conflagration is a good sample of the incapacity which is general throughout the country. Their equipment is little better than that of a bucket brigade, and they wear heavy metal caps which are sure to become heated if the wearers get near the fire. They seldom get near the flames, however, but endeavor to prevent their spread by pulling away timbers. They put in the most of their time standing around smoking pipes while the small boys of the neighborhood do the work.

One of the best proofs of the debased condition of labor in Russia is afforded by the swarms of hungry hack drivers in all the cities. In St. Petersburg alone there are over 12,000 public hacks which are used during the summer months, while during the winter over 20,000 sledges are at the disposal of the public. The drivers of these are farmers who have to supplement their labor in the country by working a portion of each year in the city. It seems a pity that the honorable and independent calling of the agriculturist should be so depressed that its members cannot make a livelihood from it, and are forced to leave their homes for a portion of each year to do



Cobbler Working in Street.

the work of metropolitan menials, yet this is the case in Russia.

## Lodging and Coffee.

There are several companies which employ these men, and the general rule is that each driver must turn in a dollar and a half every night. All he takes in over that amount he may keep for himself. Any day that he fails to turn in the stipulated sum the shortage is entered against him to be made up on succeeding days. The drivers are given a place to sleep, and are provided with coffee in the morning, but aside from this they have to buy all their food. Those who manage to earn ten dollars a month consider themselves in good luck.

Although St. Petersburg has next to no street car service, there being nothing but a horse car line on the principal thoroughfare, opposition to the hack drivers is afforded by the ice railroads. There are three of these lines that operate across and up and down the river. Their concession is only for the winter. After six months of operation the cars are retired for the remainder of the year. The fare across the river on the ice railway is only one cent, while the men who operate the sledges charge two and a half cents for each passenger.

The Russian peasant's marvelous power bearing extremes of heat and cold contributes to his ability as a coachman. When one of them takes his master or mistress out for the evening, he never thinks of seeking shelter and returning for them at the appointed time, but sits patiently on his box hour after hour. Though the cold may be intense he is muffled in numerous layers of apparel until he resembles the fat man in a side show. Because he can snooze so tranquilly when exposed to zero weather, he has been called a first cousin of the polar bear.

## The Village Industries.

There are eight million people employed in what is known as the village industries of Russia. This branch of labor was established partly on account of the long winters necessitating some occupation aside from outdoor work for the people of the farm communities and because it was contrary to their desire to leave home during the dull season. During the primitive period of this economic development the head of each household would invest his surplus cash in a stock of raw material, which would be worked up by members of the family or disposed of at a small profit to the bazaars. The idea developed until the people of a whole village or district became specialists in the manufacture of some particular article. In the province of Vladimir the inhabitants of a number of villages live by painting ikons. In another locality the residents of nineteen villages are exclusively employed in the manufacture of axes. Eighty villages turn out cutlery, and fully 200 communities are engaged in making nails. The range of the products produced in this way also includes household utensils, articles of pottery, leather goods, matting, toys and needlework.

In one of these villages an old woman will be the superintendent of a company of little girls, who are put to the task of spinning flax in a primitive way. She manages the little laborers

by reciting folk stories and reading strange tales from old books. In a near-by house some old man whose infirmities will not permit of his doing physical labor, will have charge of a crowd of boys engaged in making wicker work. At intervals during each day the little people are given a recess the same as if they were in school. If the weather is too bad for them to romp out of doors, they are allowed to sing and talk, especially if the character of the work they are doing does not require close attention.

## Increase of Poverty.

The concentration of capital has greatly damaged the village industry in Russia, like it has crushed the small operator everywhere. The managers of the co-operative enterprises found that they were forced to take less and less for their toil until they became so poor that they could hardly realize the bare necessities of life. Every member of the household, from grandchild to grandmother, has to be doing something to contribute to the family income. Thus we find the strong members of the family in a factory, or at work in the city, while the old and young attend to the farm. As soon as a boy gets to be 16 or 17 years of age he is forced to marry some strong girl so that there will be another helper in the house. These marriages are often made without any pretense of affection.

and result in immediate separation, the only advantage of the union being that the girl's labor goes to the household to which she has been joined. The art of cotton spinning and cotton weaving is an old institution in Russia. For generations it did not advance beyond the cottage industry stage, the yarn being distributed among the peasants to be worked up in their homes, but later it became modernized. In the time of Catherine there were 120 cloth factories operating on a small scale. Ten of these were located in Moscow. In discussing the industrial conditions of that period a writer says: "One sees women of all ages from 14 to 60. All are attired in rags, and even the young girls have worn-out and prematurely wrinkled faces. They have had no childhood nor any youth. They bend over their stands eighteen hours of every twenty-four, and receive for their labor only \$17.50 a year."

At the present time eighty-three per cent of the workers in the textile trade are women. The scale of wages is larger now than when the above was written, but they still get barely enough to keep life in their bodies. It is not surprising that people who are impoverished to such an extent as this, should join in revolutionary schemes that promise to improve their lot.

## The Slav's Day Off.

In order to lighten the hard life of

the poor classes the government maintains parks for their amusement in the summer time. These places are equipped with merry-go-rounds, shooting galleries, open-air pantomimes, shows, music, tests of strength appliances, etc., etc. There are 185 annual holidays in Russia, and on one of these occasions the humble subjects of the czar may be seen at the resorts standing stupidly around, munching sunflower seeds, playing accordions, or drinking tea. The gramophone is a source of never-ending delight to them. I saw a stalwart muzhik peering into the funnel of a machine with a puzzled expression that did not reflect as much intelligence as shown by the canine in the well-known advertisement called "His Master's Voice."

When the income of those engaged in village industries became so small that they were forced to take employment in the enterprises that capital had developed, they were subjected to many abuses, which wrecked their health and destroyed their happiness. For instance, when the manufacture of lucifer matches began, the employees of the factory were made to work in close rooms and soon contracted an insidious and painful disease on account of the air being tainted with the fumes of phosphorus. Laws have been enacted to protect factory workers, but the visitor to these establishments can still see enough wretchedness in an hour to give him the nightmare for a month.

Many of the employers feed and house their labor on the same premises where they work. The food consists chiefly of thick soup and coarse bread. Frequently ten families will be lodged in one room no larger than an ordinary sleeping room. This will be divided into what are called corners. There will be a bed and a tiny strip of floor curtained off where will live a father, mother and two or three children. Each apartment contains ten or more corners, making as many as forty-five or fifty persons in one room. Such a condition may be better imagined than described. The poor mortals are huddled together without privacy or convenience of any sort. The curses of a drunkard are mingled with the sobs of the wife he is beating, a sick baby wails for want of attention, and all the functions of life are exposed to the plain view of whoever chances to look into the nest of misery. "Home, Sweet Home" is indeed a misnomer for the average factory worker in Russia.

FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

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#### ANNOUNCEMENTS.

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Pittsburg, Pa., April 20.

This company does no business in California and has no dollar at risk in the San Francisco conflagration. (Signed) C. P. KELLERMAN, Secretary.  
(We are general agents for this company adjusting and paying losses here.)

**German National Insurance Company.**  
Established 1898. Assets, \$1,000,631.  
Chicago, Ill., April 21.

We are pleased to announce that all necessary arrangements have been made for the prompt adjustment and payment in full of our San Francisco losses, and that the assets of the company will remain intact.  
WILLIAM FEILER, Secretary.

**Camden Fire Insurance Association.**  
Established 1841. Assets, \$1,861,770.  
Camden, N. J., April 21.

Loss less than four hundred thousand. Our net surplus over five hundred thousand. Camden is all right. (Signed) J. LYNN TRUSCOTT, Vice President.

**Westchester Fire Insurance Co.**  
Established 1837. Assets, \$4,053,482.  
New York City, April 27th.

Westchester losses San Francisco not exceed Six Hundred Thousand. (Signed) JNO. H. KELLY, Ass't Sec'y.  
This company has a net surplus of \$1,678,128.

**Girard F. & M. Insurance Company.**  
Established 1853. Assets, \$2,123,104.  
Philadelphia, May 2.

Girard will lose less than \$450,000. HENRY M. GRATZ, Vice President.  
(This old reliable company has \$667,148 net surplus.)

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